

VZCZCXRO9142  
RR RUEHDBU  
DE RUEHYE #0346/01 1401540  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
R 201540Z MAY 09  
FM AMEMBASSY YEREVAN  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9079  
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE  
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 1774  
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 0785  
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORPORATION WASHINGTON DC  
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 0731

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 000346

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/19/2019  
TAGS: [PBTS](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [KJUS](#) [AM](#)  
SUBJECT: LTP ASSAILS SARGSIAN ON RECENT FOREIGN POLICY  
DEVELOPMENTS

REF: YEREVAN 306

YEREVAN 00000346 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: DCM Joseph Pennington, reasons 1.4 (b/d)

-----  
SUMMARY  
-----

¶1. (SBU) In his first major campaign rally for the Yerevan mayoral election, ex-President Levon Ter-Petrossian (LTP) sidestepped discussion of local issues and instead assailed President Sargsian on recent foreign policy developments. LTP called President Sargsian's rapprochement initiative with Turkey a failure, saying Sargsian had failed to secure the opening of the Turkish-Armenia border "even in exchange for a repudiation of the Armenian genocide." LTP then accused Sargsian of losing his cool after the border opening failure and resorting to desperate demarches with the West that had also backfired on Armenia. As a result, LTP charged, the U.S. had decided to cut assistance to Armenia, Turkey had gotten the United Nations to table an anti-Armenia resolution, and the Council of Europe had placed Armenia back on its agenda for its summer session where it risks being sanctioned. LTP called on Sargsian to either begin a reconciliation process with the political opposition that includes the release of all March 1 detainees, or resign. Both the rally, which approximately 5,000 supporters attended, and the unauthorized march that followed it, proceeded peacefully. END SUMMARY.

-----  
LTP SLAMS SARGSIAN ON FOREIGN POLICY DEVELOPMENTS  
-----

¶2. (SBU) On May 15 at his first major campaign rally devoted to the Yerevan mayoral election, LTP slammed President Sargsian for his rapprochement initiative with Turkey, labeling it a failure. He ridiculed Sargsian for failing to get Turkey to open its border with Armenia "even in exchange for a repudiation of the Armenian genocide." LTP said the United States and Turkey had convinced Sargsian to give up "genocide" recognition by getting him to agree to a bilateral historical commission of experts to study the subject, with Sargsian expecting a border opening in return. When Sargsian caved on that issue, LTP then charged that the United States and Turkey had subsequently imposed a new precondition on him, saying "give up Karabakh and we will open the border." As a result, LTP declared that "no other head of state has found himself in such a miserable position."

¶3. (SBU) LTP said that as a result of his failed initiative, Sargsian felt "cheated by America and Turkey like a child," and began to lash out with emotional demarches. These

included a) Armenia's recent decision not to participate in NATO's Partnership for Peace exercises in Georgia; b) Sargsian hardening his position on the Nagorno Karabakh settlement terms at his May 7 meeting with President Aliyev in Prague; and c) the emergence of serious discussions in Stepanakert that the NK "authorities" should now become party to the settlement negotiations process. LTP compared Sargsian to Georgian President Saakshvili before the outbreak of the August conflict with Russia, saying he was making decisions based on emotions rather than logic.

¶4. (SBU) LTP then asserted that even these demarches by Sargsian had ended in failure. He said that a) the United States had decided to decrease its annual level of assistance to Armenia by 40 percent, stopped humanitarian aid to NK, and increased its military aid to Azerbaijan; b) Turkey had tabled an anti-Armenia resolution at the UN attacking Armenia for its occupation of Azerbaijani territory; and c) the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) had placed Armenia back on its agenda for discussion at the June part-session. (Comment and Note: LTP's arguments on many of these issues are factually inaccurate. Prior to LTP's remarks, the Embassy on May 12 had issued a press release explaining the assistance figures and process, which LTP obviously chose to ignore and distort. Also, in early April it had appeared that Armenia might not figure on the agenda of PACE this summer, after it had complied with one of the provisions in an earlier PACE resolution stipulating that the authorities drop controversial criminal charges against prominent oppositionists detained after the March 1 events. But in late April, it was disclosed that PACE had decided to include discussion of Armenia's compliance with its resolutions at the upcoming summer session, currently scheduled for June 22-26. End Comment and Note.)

YEREVAN 00000346 002.2 OF 002

-----  
TALK TO THE OPPOSITION, OR RESIGN  
-----

¶5. (SBU) LTP then said that the recent foreign policy developments did not mean that the West wants to punish Sargsian, because Sargsian is a valuable partner for them, and the West "will close its eyes" to the lack of domestic legitimacy that he suffers in Armenia. He said that the developments mean Armenia's interests and people are being adversely affected. LTP declared that Sargsian had only two ways out of his current predicament. One is to enter into talks with the political opposition and release all the March 1 detainees. The other is to resign.

-----  
LTP's STARK WARNING TO VOTERS  
-----

¶6. (SBU) As he has been known to do in the past, LTP then issued an ultimatum veiled as a warning to Yerevan voters on the upcoming election. To those residents who do not plan to vote for his Armenian National Congress on Election Day, LTP declared "those who will prefer to step aside and keep silent, those who will sell their votes, those who will vote for government candidates, and finally those who will display indifference and won't take part in the elections, will not only deprive their children of an opportunity to live in a normal, civilized and secure country but will become accomplices of the malevolent authorities who ... have stepped onto the path of national treason."

-----  
RALLY PEACEFUL, BUT CEC UNDER HEAVY GUARD  
-----

¶7. (C) The authorized rally that took place at the Matenadaran, Yerevan's Ancient Manuscripts Museum where LTP used to be a scholar, took place peacefully, and was

monitored primarily by regular police units. The unauthorized march that took place afterwards also proceeded peacefully. But Embossos following the rally noticed an unprecedented number of riot police in full riot gear posted in front of the Central Electoral Commission (CEC), which is located on a side street near the Matenadaran. Embossos counted 11 buses parked one after the other, with approximately 30 riot police in each bus, along the entire length of the street. A water cannon vehicle and a fire engine were positioned at the north and south ends of the street as well. As for reports earlier in the day that police out in Armenia's regions had erected roadblocks to prevent opposition supporters to travel to Yerevan for the rally, the Embassy dispatched several vehicles to Yerevan's city limits and found that only one of the three main entry points had roadblocks. Embassy drivers also noted, however, the absence of mini vans on these routes, which suggested that some drivers had been ordered not to operate on their regular routes during the day.

-----  
COMMENT  
-----

18. (C) A cutthroat political operator, LTP did not miss a beat in assailing Sargsian on an issue where the current president has become increasingly vulnerable. LTP's gratuitous distortion of the facts aside, his ratcheting up of attacks on Sargsian's domestic legitimacy and now his handling of foreign policy appears to be a calculated message aimed at Armenian voters and the international community. What we find interesting in LTP's arguments that Sargsian is neither fit to govern nor deliver diplomatic breakthroughs is that he proposes no alternative course of action. Also, the almost complete disregard of local issues in his remarks at the rally suggests that LTP has either little to say on the subject, or thinks local issues are beneath him, which, as we're finding out in the Yerevan election, is not that uncommon among Armenia's political elite.  
YOVANOVITCH